

James and Mary Murray Murdoch

James and Mary were married in Auchinleck, Ayrshire, Scotland, January 10, 1811. We have little recorded history of James except that he was born about 1786, at Comondyke, Ayrshire, Scotland. His father was James Murdoch and his mother Janet Osborne. He was said to be a second cousin of William Murdoch, the inventor of gas lighting. He was employed at the Lime Works in Gaswater, Ayrshire, and on October 20, 1831, lost his life trying to rescue a man who had fallen a victim of foul air in the bottom of a new mine shaft they were sinking. Both were overcome by the gas and died.

Mary, or Wee Granny, as she was called, was born October 13, 1782, at Glencairn, Dumfries, Scotland. Her father was John Murray, and Margaret McCall was her mother. We know very little of Mary until 1811, when on January 10, she married James Murdoch.

They were the parents of eight children; they were: Janet, who married Alexander Smith; Mary, who died in childhood; James, who married Margaret McCall (the same name as Mary Murdoch's mother); Veronica, who married George Caldwell; Mary, who married Allan Mair; John Murray, who married Ann Steel and Isabella Crawford; Margaret, who died in childhood; and William, who married Janet Lennox and Mary Reid Lindsay.

Mary was a hard worker and was a thrifty, frugal wife, and a kind and loving mother to her children. She knew how to control them and still retain their love and respect. She was four feet seven inches tall, weighing a little over ninety pounds, with blue-gray eyes and with a medium complexion.

The sudden death of her husband caused Mary much grief and sorrow, yet she had a brave and courageous spirit, and she was always able to prove herself equal to her task, as she did in the trial of losing her husband.

Wee Granny, as we affectionately know her, was left with six children, and an orphaned niece, Margaret Murray, who was about four years of age. The four oldest children, Janet, James, Veronica, and Mary, were old enough to work and do for themselves. John was ten years of age and William was six. Wee Granny found work for herself as well as the older children, and they were able to provide the necessities of life.

A few years after her husband's death, she was able, with the help of her sons, to build a little thatched-roof stone cottage which they could call their own. Much love and happiness was crowded into its four walls.

In 1907 William Lindsay visited Ayrshire and saw the ruins of Wee Granny's cottage. He also saw the spot where

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James Murdoch lost his life. The shaft in which he died was just a new one and was about twenty-five feet deep, but after the tragedy it was never sunk any deeper, but was allowed to cave in and fill up. The depression was about five feet deep and had wild daisies growing in it.

In 1850 the Mormon elders came to Scotland preaching the restored gospel. John, who was married, readily accepted it. Wee Granny and Mary, her daughter, made a careful and prayerful investigation of the new doctrine and they were also convinced of its truth. They were baptized by those who held the priesthood and could officiate in this ordinance. Wee Granny was sixty-seven years old at this time. Later Veronica and William were baptized. These four, John, Mary, Veronica, and William were the children who came to Utah.

In 1852, John, his wife, and two children immigrated to Utah, and in 1856 he sent his mother the money that she might come to Zion. Wee Granny was almost seventy-four years of age when she started on the long, wearisome 6,000-mile journey, alone as far as her family was concerned, but in the company with John's brother-in-law, James Steel, and his wife and two children, George and James. She had a determined will to accomplish what she deemed was right. She loved the gospel, and her desire was to be with her son and Saints in Zion. When she arrived at Iowa City, she was assigned to the Martin Handcart Company. There were five companies to leave in the summer of 1856. The first three arrived safely with little difficulty, but the Martin and Willie companies met with tragedy. Because wagons and oxen were very expensive, these groups used handcarts that they could pull themselves. They could actually walk faster than the slow, plodding oxen. Because the handcarts and tents were not ready, the Martin and Willie companies were forced to wait until late July. They were advised not to make the trek so late in the season, but it was their desire to go.

The Martin Company was the last to leave. This group was made up largely of immigrants from England, Scotland, and Scandinavia. Many of them were women, children, and aged. They left Iowa City on July 28, and it was a month later that they left Florence, Nebraska, the last settlement for hundreds of miles. Their hastily constructed handcarts were made of unseasoned wood, and they fell to pieces in the hot prairie sun. It took precious time to repair them. The Cheyennes were on the warpath, and word came to the suffering pioneers of massacres by the red man. A.W. Babbitt, secretary of Utah Territory, and some of his party had been killed. Their food was very scarce, and they were weakened by the lack of nourishment. They were improperly clad for the inclement weather. An early and severe winter had set in. By September there were heavy frosts. Of the 575 members of the company, almost one fourth of them died before they reached Utah. They were buried in shallow graves, usually wrapped only in a sheet. Sometimes a common grave was dug and all who died that day were buried together. Some poor souls were buried in a bank of snow. Much has been written of the handcart pioneers, and their history is Wee Granny's history.

Wee Granny trudged bravely on as far as Chimney Rock, Nebraska. Here she succumbed to fatigue, exposure, and the hardships of the journey on October 3, 1856. Her weary, worn-out body was buried in a shallow grave, without a coffin, by the side of the wagon trail. Just before passing, she said to her friends gathered around her, "Tell John I died with my face toward Zion."

No word of murmur or complaint ever passed her lips. Who shall say she is not entitled to a martyr's crown in the mansions of glory?

To us Wee Granny is a symbol of fineness, bravery, nobleness, of a true Latter-day Saint--she stands for everything that is good and sweet. She is a living symbol--while in the flesh she personalized these fine qualities, now her living and progressing spirit is gaining exaltation by these same attributes. May we ever appreciate Wee Granny, and may we and our children never forget her.

Temple work has been completed as follows in the Manti Temple:

James was baptized September 16, 1890. He was endowed September 18, 1890.

Mary (Wee Granny) was baptized December 22, 1851. She was endowed September 17, 1890.

She was sealed to James November 19, 1902, in the Salt Lake Temple. All eight children were sealed to their parents in the Salt Lake Temple.



James Steel
(Picture taken
at Kilmarnock,
Scotland.)



Elizabeth Wyllie



James Steel

Elizabeth Wyllie introduced James Steel to the gospel. James introduced John Murray and Anne Steel to the gospel. In crossing the plains James died shortly after Wee Granny. Elizabeth and their two sons James and George completed the trek to Salt Lake Valley.

Mary Murray Murdoch

A Tribute to "Wee Granny" Mary Murray Murdoch
who died in 1856 at Chimney Rock

On the broad plains of Nebraska stands a lonely sentinel—
Majestic Chimney Rock! What stories it could tell.
If only it could speak, I'd say, "Old rock, do you recall
The Mormon handcart pioneers who came late in the fall
Of eighteen hundred and fifty-six? One of the Martin band
Was my little Scottish Grandma, en route to the Promised Land.
On the purple heathered highland she had spent her childhood days,
There she won a fine Scotch laddie with her sweet and winning ways.
Eight wee bairns blessed their humble home, and the cup of happiness
they quaffed.
When the brave kind husband tried to save a dying man from a gas filled
shaft,
Both lost their lives. Then my Wee Granny raised her family alone.
She taught them thrift and work, and love of truth, and kin, and home.
In a rough-stone, thatch-roofed cottage she watched her family grow,
And saw them choose mates of their own and from her fireside go.
In 1850, the elders came from Christ's Church of latter-days
The gospel in its fulness swelled her soul with joy and praise
That she could know salvation's plan while still she lived on earth,
And with some of her children be baptized and have new birth.
As time passed, she longed for Zion, where her son had found a home.
For the first time in seventy-three years, Wee Granny began to roam.
She bade farewell to loved ones, looked last at the bonnie braes,
A lone but happy pilgrim, she set out upon her way.
Across the wide Atlantic in sailing vessel tossed,
From New York on to Iowa, but she counted not the cost
On her frail and aging body, for her spirit was so strong.
And she felt so close to Utah, she could travel right along.
With the Martin handcart company, the last to leave, her unhappy lot was
cast.
Their handcarts broke, their food was scarce, they felt the chilling blast
Of a hard and early winter, but bravely they went along,
In their hearts a prayer to God, and on their lips a song.
Perhaps old Chimney Rock would speak with the voice of the sighing wind:
"I saw that last brave handcart band, and my stone heart wept within.
Scores of women, children, aged, from a mild and gentle land,
Combatting hunger, fear, and weariness, 'twas more than the strong could
stand.
At my side these brave souls huddled, sick and dying, cold and weak,
But no complaining word or grumble did I ever hear them speak.
I longed to reach my rough arms out and lift them as they fell,
But they sang as they buried their many dead, 'All is well--all is well.'"
I lift my head with pride and reverence. My Wee Granny's buried at your
feet.
How she longed to enter Utah, the Saints and her son to meet.
She was never known to murmur. She did her tasks both large and small.
With her life she loved the gospel, and for it she gave her all.
When her weary life was ebbing, with her eyes turned to the west:
'Tell my son John I faced Zion when I died; he'll know the rest.'

James Murdoch

James Murdoch was the third child of eight children born to James and Mary Murray Murdoch. His date of birth is July 29, 1814, in Gaswater, Ayrshire, Scotland. He no doubt was named after his father and grandfather, being the first son in the family. He was seventeen years old when his father lost his life on October 20, 1831, in a mine pit trying to rescue a young man who had gone into it and was overcome with foul gas. James then had two younger sisters and two younger brothers to assist his mother (Wee Granny). Being the eldest son he became man of the family. He had probably already been working for some years by now to earn his own keep and assist the family in the meager times they lived in.

John Murray Murdoch in his own history mentions James helping them to build a cottage for Mary Murray Murdoch (Wee Granny) and the rest of the family to live in following their father's death. He also said that he worked for his brother James doing repairs on a mine at Lugar in 1851. (Murdoch Messenger, #3, pp. 11-12.)

James did not get married until he was twenty-seven years of age. His sisters Janet, Veronica, and Mary all preceded him in marriage. He married Margaret McCall on November 24, 1841, at Leadhills, Dumfriesshire, Scotland. Margaret is said also to have been born there about 1820.

Before November 7, 1853, James had moved his family to Glasgow, Lanark, Scotland. This was the date of his son Thomas's birth in Glasgow. Here on August 26, 1854, he and Margaret were to experience the death of their six-year-old William. This was only the beginning of sorrow for them, as four other sons were also to die soon under the age of twenty-seven and preceding James in death, as did his wife also. They were parents to nine sons.

David Lennox Murdoch said about James: "James married Margaret McCall. They had a large family and lived in Glasgow. I think they all must be gone now as I could get no trace of any of them while over there 1905-06-07 altho I even advertised in the paper for them. A son William (second) came here and lived for a time in Heber City and Park City. He died in this city and was burried in the City Cemetery." William died in Salt Lake City.

Margaret McCall is said to have died about 1880 in Scotland, and James September 12, 1884, at seventy years of

Mrs. Murdoch

age in Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Scotland. From the letter printed from James to his nephew David Lennox Murdoch written on December 16, 1878 we sense a loneliness. "I hope you are all in good health and that it is not trouble or want of time that some of you are not minding old Jamie that you have left behind with a bit letter at a time to cheer up his cast down spirits, you don't know how glad I am in a morning when my Laird comes up to my door with a letter in his hand saying its an American." James was now alone except for nieces and nephews from the Smith family and his sons, perhaps James, John, Thomas, William, and George, who we do not have death dates for. His mother and his only living sisters and brothers and their families had all gone to America.

Perhaps there are some of his descendants today in Scotland from the sons mentioned above that we do not know about as a family organization. If anyone in the family has more information concerning this family, your family officers would appreciate knowing of it. Neither James nor any of his sons ever joined the Church as his mother, two sisters, and two brothers did. All temple work has been done for this family.



These were among David Lennox Murdoch's pictures that were taken at J.C. Burne Photographer Court House Square, Glasgow, Scotland. David Labeled them thus:

Mrs. James Murdoch

John Murdoch

